

UNCLE VANYA
BY
ANTON CHEKHOV

Adaptation by William Missouri Downs

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR ALEXANDER SEREBRYAKOFF
(A retired professor)

HELENA ANDREIEVNA
(His wife, aged twenty-seven)

SONYA
(The Professor's daughter from a previous marriage)

MARIA VASSILIEVNA VOINITSKAYA
(A widow and mother of the Professor's first wife)

I VAN VOINITSKY (UNCLE VANYA)
(Her son)

MIKHAIL DR. ASTROFF
(A doctor)

ILYA TELYEGIN (WAFFLES)
(An impoverished landowner)

NURSE MARINA

A WORKMAN

(The action takes place on an old estate/farm that is leaning
towards dire financial straits – 1899)

UNCLE VANYA

ONE

An Overgrown Garden/lawn

(Located near the house and terrace. A folding table is set for tea in an avenue of trees, under an old poplar. Near the table are some weathered benches, chairs and a tree swing. It is three o'clock in the afternoon on a cloudy day.)

(NURSE MARINA, a quiet, gray-haired, little old woman, sits at the table knitting a stocking. DR. ASTROFF paces nearby.)

A little tea, Doctor?

NURSE MARINA

I don't seem to care for any just now.

DR. ASTROFF

Vodka?

NURSE MARINA

Contrary to what some think, I don't drink every day. And, besides, it is too warm.

DR. ASTROFF

Suit yourself.

NURSE MARINA

(She pours vodka into her teacup and sips. He can't resist and also has a little.)

Tell me, nurse, how long have we known each other?

DR. ASTROFF

Let me see, how long has it been? Lord help my memory. You came here - let me see - when was it? I was nurse to Sonya's mother then - two winters later she passed away - that was eleven years ago- perhaps much longer.

NURSE MARINA

DR. ASTROFF

Have I changed a great deal since?

NURSE MARINA

Oh, yes. You were young and handsom in those days. Now you're old and no longer good looking. And you drink.

DR. ASTROFF

You're right. Ten years have made another man of me. And why? Because I am overworked. Ever since I've known you, I haven't had a single carefree day. How could I help but grow old? Life is a stagnant, senseless, dirty business, and drags on ceaselessly. Thank God, my brain hasn't turned to mud yet, though my feelings have grown dull. But I'm not dead yet. Yet I ask for nothing, I need nothing, there is no one I'm fond of, except you. *(He kisses her head)* When I was a child, I had a nurse just like you.

NURSE MARINA

Hungry?

DR. ASTROFF

No. *(Beat)* During the third week of Lent, an epidemic of typhoid broke out at Malitskoi, and I was called. The peasants were all stretched side by side in their huts, and the calves and pigs were running among the sick. How filthy it was, and such... fumes! Beyond description! I slaved among those people all day. Not a crumb to eat. But when I got home they wouldn't let me rest: a switchman is carried in from the railroad yard; I lay him on the operating table and he died in my arms under the chloroform... And then although my feelings should have been dead, they rose again; my conscience tortured me as if I'd murdered him. I sat down and shut my eyes and thought: will our descendants two hundred years from now, for whom we toil so, will they remember us with kindness? No, nurse, they will forget.

NURSE MARINA

Man forgets, God remembers.

DR. ASTROFF

Thank you for that. A nice saying.

(UNCLE VANYA wakes up nearby. He has been sleeping after a meal and looks somewhat disheveled. Bits of straw and grass are stuck to his pants and jacket. He sits down on the bench and straightens his tie.)

UNCLE VANYA

H'm. Yes. *(Beat)* Yes.

DR. ASTROFF

Did you have a good nap?

UNCLE VANYA

Yes, very good. I think. *(Yawns)* What has happened to me? Ever since the Professor and his wife came, our lives seem to have left its assigned groove. I sleep all day and I'm up all night. And I eat all kinds of green vegetables for dinner. That can't be healthy. Sonya and I used to work together and we never had an idle moment. But now she works alone and I just eat, drink and sleep it off.

NURSE MARINA

Such goings on. The Professor stays in bed till noon, the samovar is kept boiling all morning, waiting for *him*. Before they came we used to dine at one, like everybody else, but now we dine at seven. Then the Professor sits up all night writing and reading, and suddenly, at two o'clock in the morning the bell rings. Goodness me what is it? The Professor wants hot tea! Wake the house, light the samovar! Lord, such goings on.

DR. ASTROFF

Are they staying much longer?

UNCLE VANYA

It could be a hundred years! He's my personal nightmare – the houseguest who forgets to leave. I wouldn't be surprised if Professor PhD has decided to make this his year round residence.

DR. ASTROFF

He wouldn't.

UNCLE VANYA

Never mind, don't get excited; here they come. Act normal.

(Voices are heard. PROFESSOR, HELENA, SONYA, and WAFFLES enter from the depths of the garden, returning from their walk.)

PROFESSOR

Superb! Superb! What glorious views!

SONYA

Tomorrow could we go in to the woods, papa, not just look at them?

UNCLE VANYA

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, tea is served.

PROFESSOR

Oh. Yes. Won't you please deliver it to the library?

UNCLE VANYA

Library. What library?

PROFESSOR

The room you assigned me. I have some important scholarly work to finish. You'll do that for me won't you?

UNCLE VANYA

Of course, I'm here to serve you.

PROFESSOR

And let's be quiet about it, don't squeak on the stairs.

SONYA
(*As they exit*)

I'm sure you'll love the woods, papa.

(HELENA, PROFESSOR, and SONYA go into the house. NURSE MARINA fixes a cup of tea.)

UNCLE VANYA

There goes our esteemed house guest and scholar on a hot, sultry day wearing an overcoat, rubbers and gloves - And carrying an umbrella!

DR. ASTROFF

Perhaps he's trying to take care of himself.

UNCLE VANYA

Yet on his arm... How lovely! Never in my life have I seen a more magnificent creature.

WAFFLES

(Hinting)

Do you know, Marina, when I look at this table here, my heart swells with a great happiness? The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and contentment – what more can the soul desire?

NURSE MARINA

Stop beating around the bush, you can have some tea.

WAFFLES

I thank you with all my heart.

UNCLE VANYA

(Still looking off at her)

Her eyes – an enchanting woman don't you think?

DR. ASTROFF

Come, Ivan, you're no better than a broken phonograph - Tell us something new.

UNCLE VANYA

Like what?

DR. ASTROFF

Anything. News. Gossip. Anything but what you have said before.

(NURSE MARINA exits with tea.)

UNCLE VANYA

No, everything is old. I'm the same as ever, or perhaps worse, for I've become lethargic. I do nothing anymore but croak like an old raven. My mother, the old magpie, is still chattering about the emancipation of women, with one eye on her grave and the other on her learned books, in which she is forever searching for the dawn of a new philosophy.

DR. ASTROFF

But the Professor is change in the old routine.

UNCLE VANYA

The Professor ought to write his autobiography; he'd make a really excellent subject for a long, boring stupid book. Just consider, the life of a retired professor as stale as a piece of old bread, racked with gout, headaches and rheumatism, his liver bursting with jealousy and envy, living on the estate of his first wife, my sister, although he hates it, because he can't afford to retire in the city and so he constantly whines about his hard fate, although the truth is, he's unusually lucky. The son of a low level deacon, he has achieved a professor's chair, and become the son-in-law of a magistrate, and so is called "your Excellency." Which is of course absurd. But never mind! Never mind!

DR. ASTROFF

The truth is--.

UNCLE VANYA

The truth! The truth is for twenty-five years he's been writing about art and aesthetics and sending his words off to stuffy academic journals, that I'd be willing to bet about five people actually read, and yet he doesn't know the very first thing about art. The truth, for twenty-five years he's been chewing over other men's ideas on realism, naturalism, and all such nonsense; for twenty-five years he has been reading and writing things that academics find oh so fascinating and stupid ones could care less about; for twenty-five years all he's done is keep a better man out of a job. Absolutely no one misses him at the University! He is a man devoid of talent and yet he walks around the place with an air of importance. Look at him – nothing but a dried prune, yet he stalks around the place like an icon! And looks down at the world from the height of his baseness. Let me tell you, university education brings out all abilities - including stupidity.

DR. ASTROFF

I believe you're jealous.

UNCLE VANYA

Of course I'm jealous! And look at the success he's had with the ladies! Don Juan himself could stand to take lessons from that decrepit old cooch! The professor's first wife, my dear departed sister - who was beautiful, gentle, and as pure as this blue sky - loved him without question. His mother-in-law, my mother, adores and worships him for absolutely no logical reason. And now his second wife is - as you can see - a great beauty - She married him in his old age and in doing so surrendered all the glory of her beauty and her freedom and what for? Why?

DR. ASTROFF

So they sleep in the same bed?

UNCLE VANYA

Regrettably.

DR. ASTROFF

Regrettably, why?

UNCLE VANYA

Because such fidelity is freakish, from root to branch, freakish. It sounds all very well, down right cute, but there's no logic to it. She has stifled her youth and squandered... her... her... talents on *grandpa*. It's perverted! Twisted! The sex must be macabre!

WAFFLES

Vanya, I don't like to hear you say such things. Anyone who betrays their husband or wife is faithless and would betray his country, too.

UNCLE VANYA

Please, you're killing me. Go *do* something.

WAFFLES

What shall I do?

UNCLE VANYA

Anything! Attend to your finances or something.

WAFFLES

What finances do I have to attend to?

UNCLE VANYA

Then go *do* something. Anything! But please avoid talking.

(UNCLE VANYA sits on the bench.
WAFFLES joins him.)

WAFFLES

My wife ran away with her lover the day after our wedding, because my appearance was... was... unprepossessing. Since then I have never failed in my duty. I love her and am true to her to this very day. I help her all I can and I've given my fortune to educate our children which she conceived with her lover! I have lost my happiness but kept my pride. And she? Her youth has fled, her beauty faded and her lover dead – totally dead. What does she have now! Ha! *(He laughs so hard he spits up a little tea)*

(HELENA enters followed by NURSE pushing WIDOW MARIYA in a wheelchair. NURSE MARIA reads a book which she never takes her eyes off.)

UNCLE VANYA
(Sarcastic)

Oh joy, my mother has arrived. Things just can't get better.

(SONYA enters.)

SONYA

Nurse, some peasants are waiting out there. Go and see what they wish. I shall pour the tea.

(She pours several glasses of tea. NURSE MARINA goes out still reading. HELENA takes a glass and sits in the swing drinking.)

DR. ASTROFF
(To Helena)

I came to see your husband. You sent a message that he is very ill, that he has rheumatism and what not, but he seems as lively as a cricket.

HELENA

Yes, last night Alexander complained of troubling pains in his legs, but he seems all right today.

DR. ASTROFF

I hurried here twenty miles at a break-neck gallop, but no matter! It isn't the first time. Now that I'm here, however, I'm going to stay until tomorrow.

SONYA.

Oh, splendid! You spend the night with us so seldom. Have you had dinner, Doctor?

DR. ASTROFF

None what so ever.

SONYA

Then you will have it with us. We dine at seven now. (*Drinks her tea*) Oh, this tea is cold.

WAFFLES

Yes, the temperature of the samovar has dropped significantly.

HELENA

Never mind, Ivan Ivanovitch, we'll drink our tea cold.

WAFFLES

I beg your pardon, my name is not Ivan, but Ilya Ilyitch, ma'am - Ilya Ilyitch Telyegin, or Waffles, as they sometimes call me because of my pock-marked face. I am Sonya's godfather, and his Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I now live with you on this estate, and perhaps you will be good enough to notice that I dine with you every day!

SONYA

Dear godfather, let me pour you some more tea.

WIDOW MARIYA

Oh! Oh! Oh!

SONYA

What is it, grandmother?

WIDOW MARIYA

I forgot to tell Alexander - Amnesia, I swear I'm suffering from amnesia – what was I saying?

SONYA

You forgot to tell Alexander.

WIDOW MARIYA

Oh! That's right. What was I saying?

SONYA

You forgot to tell Alexander.

WIDOW MARIYA

I received a letter today from Pavel Alexeievitch in Kharkoff. He sent me his new philosophical pamphlet. Once again he attempts to comprehend the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence.

DR. ASTROFF

Is it interesting?

WIDOW MARIYA

Yes. I mean no. Instead of building on his previous arguments he instead refutes the very theories which he so ardently defended seven years ago. It's appalling! Appalling!

UNCLE VANYA

There is nothing appalling about it. Pavel Alexeievitch is an imbecile. So put something in your mouth so you won't talk.

(UNCLE VANYA hands her roll.)

WIDOW MARIYA

But I want to say something.

UNCLE VANYA

That's all we've been doing these last forty years, talking and talking and reading silly philosophical pamphlets. Man believes what he believes. And they are honest and truthful so long as it is unnecessary.

WIDOW MARIYA

You never care to listen to what I have to say. Pardon me, but you have changed so this last year that I hardly know you. You used to be a man of character. You had an illuminating personality--.

UNCLE VANYA

Oh, yes. I had an illuminating personality, which illuminated no one. Illuminating personality! Could you say anything more cruel? Oh, if you only knew! Until last year, I like you, blinded myself with all that pedantic rubbish. If you knew how I lie awake at night, heartsick and angry, to think how stupidly I wasted my time on this earth when I might have been wresting from life everything which my middle age now forbids.

SONYA

Is this depressing? I think this is depressing.

WIDOW MARIYA

(To her son)

Blame yourself, it's your fault.

UNCLE VANYA

My fault?

WIDOW MARIYA

You've forgotten that a conviction, in and of itself, is nothing but a dead letter. You should have done something with your life.

UNCLE VANYA

Like what? Become academic? Ordinary hypocrites pretend to be doves, literary and academic hypocrites pretend to be eagles. But they are not eagles but rats and dog.

SONYA

Grandmother! Uncle Vanya! I beg you!

UNCLE VANYA
I'll shut up. I apologize. I'm silent. Is everybody happy?

(Beat.)

HELENA
What a fine day! Not too hot.

UNCLE VANYA
A fine day to hang oneself.

(WAFFLES tunes his guitar. NURSE MARINA appears near the house, calling the chickens.)

NURSE MARINA
Chick, chick, chick!

SONYA
What did the peasants wish, nurse?

NURSE MARINA
Oh, the same old same old. They want to farm our unused land. Chick, chick, chick!

SONYA
Why do you call the chickens?

NURSE MARINA
The speckled hen disappeared with her chicks. I'm afraid the crows got her.

(WAFFLES plays a polka. Every one listens in silence as they sip their tea.)

WAFFLES
(*Singing*)
The crows got her, the crows got her... The crows got her, the crows got her... She most likely dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. The crows got her, the crows got her... And so now she's dead...

(A Workman enters.)

WORKMAN
Hello! Hello! Is the doctor here?

DR. ASTROFF
You'd know it. Like clock work!

WORKMAN
Please, Mikhail Lvovitch, I've been sent for you.

DR. ASTROFF
Where do you come from?

WORKMAN
The iron factory.

DR. ASTROFF

Oh great. Another industrial accident. I suppose I shall have to go whether I wish to or not. (*Looking around him for his cap*) Damn, this getting annoying!

SONYA

Yes, it is too bad, really. You must return for dinner. I would love to cook for you.

(Dr. ASTROFF tries to pour himself a shot of vodka but the bottle is empty.)

DR. ASTROFF

No, I won't be able - It'll be too late. (*To the Workman*) Look here, fellow, get me a glass of vodka, will *you*?

WORKMAN

Of course, sir.

(THE WORKMAN exits.)

DR. ASTROFF

Where-where--. (*Finds his cap*) Ah! There is a character in a play I saw once that reminded me of me – It was the story of a man who wished to devote his life to literature So he studied hard, moved to the city, where after many years of struggle gets a job as a censor. And now he hasn't a moment to himself. The performance deeply effected me. But let me bid you good-bye. (*To Helena*) I should be delighted if you came to see me some day... My tiny estate is surrounded by government forests. The caretaker is old, always ailing, so I oversee almost all of the work myself.

HELENA

I've heard that you're very fond of the woods, but doesn't that interfere with your real vocation?

DR. ASTROFF

God alone knows what's a man's real vocation is.

HELENA

Nothing but trees and more trees. I should think you would find it monotonous.

SONYA

No, the work is thrilling. The Doctor watches over the old woods south of town. He sets out new trees every year, and has already received numerous awards for his work. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, that they teach mankind to understand beauty and to attune his mind to lofty views. Did I get that right?

UNCLE VANYA

(*Laughing*)

Bravo! Bravo! All this is very pretty, but unconvincing. What are you saying my friend? (*To Astroff*), You won't let me burn firewood in my stoves or build my barns of planks.

DR. ASTROFF

You can burn peat in your stoves and build your barns of stone. Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood when you have to, but why destroy whole forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the ax. Millions of trees have perished. The homes of the animals and the birds have been laid desolate; the rivers are shrinking, and

soon the beautiful landscapes will be gone forever. And why? Because human beings are too lazy, too shortsighted to stoop and pick their fuel from the ground. (To *Helena*) Who but a senseless barbarian could burn so much beauty and destroy what he cannot create himself?

(The WORKMAN brings him a glass of vodka.)

WORKMAN

Here you are sir.

DR. ASTROFF

However... (*He drinks*) It's all utter nonsense. I must be off. Farewell.

(DR. ASTROFF goes toward the house.
SONYA takes his arm and leaves with him.
THE WORKMAN tags long behind.)

SONYA
(*As they exit*)

When are you coming to see us again?

DR. ASTROFF

I don't know.

SONYA

Soon I hope?

(And they are gone.)

HELENA

Ivan Petrovitch, you behaved shockingly again. What sense is there in teasing Maria Vassilievna. And at breakfast you quarreled with my husband. How petty it all is. What could possibly be your motivation?

UNCLE VANYA

Simple, I hate him.

HELENA

Then you hate without reason; he may be an academic but he's human like every one else.

UNCLE VANYA

If you could only see your face, your gesticulations, oh, how dull and empty your life must be!

HELENA

Yes, it is tedious, and dreary, too! - All of you abuse my husband and look on me with sympathy; you think, "Poor thing, she's married to an old man." Why can't you look with indifference at a woman unless she belongs to you?

UNCLE VANYA

I don't care much for your insights.

HELENA

Unlike you, the doctor has a sensitive face - an interesting face. Sonya evidently likes him.

UNCLE VANYA

Really?

HELENA

She's in love with him, and I can understand why. This is the third time he's been here since I have come, but I'm shy and I've not had a real talk with him yet or showed him much attention. He must think that I'm uncaring. Why are you and the Doctor friends? I think it is because you're both lonely and unsympathetic. Yes, unsympathetic.

(She turns to find UNCLE VANYA looking at her.)

HELENA

Don't look at me that way.

UNCLE VANYA

How can I look at you any other way since I love you? You are my joy, my life, my youth. I know that the chance of you loving me in return are... are... infinitely small? Okay fine, there is no chance! I ask nothing of you. Except to allow me to gaze upon you--.

HELENA

Hush, they may hear you.

(HELENA heads toward the house. VANYA follows.)

UNCLE VANYA

Let me tell you of my love, let me listen to your sweet voice!

HELENA

This is agony!

UNCLE VANYA

Please, what happiness do I have left?

HELENA

Agony!

UNCLE VANYA

Let me walk with you!

HELENA

No.

UNCLE VANYA

I'll take that as a "yes."

(Both go into the house.)

WAFFLES

(Singing)

The crows got her, the crows got her... The crows got her, the crows got her...

(WAFFLES plays a polka. WIDOW MARIYA writes something in her pamphlet and the lights fade.)

End of One

UNCLE VANYA

TWO

A Dining Room

(There is a piano and table. It is night. The PROFESSOR dozes in an arm-chair by an open window and HELENA, half-asleep, is seated beside him. WAFFLES sleeps sitting up – with his guitar.)

PROFESSOR
(Waking)

What! What! What! Who's there? Sonya?

HELENA

No. It's me. Your wife.

PROFESSOR

Oh, it's you, Lenutchka. This pain is unbearable.

HELENA

Your shawl has slipped. *(She wraps the shawl around his legs)* Let me shut the window.

PROFESSOR

No, I'm suffocating... Just now I dreamed that my left leg belonged to some one else. Then it started hurting so that I awoke. This can't be gout; it's more like rheumatism. What time is it?

HELENA

Twenty after twelve?

PROFESSOR

I wish you'd look for Batiushkov in the library tomorrow.

HELENA

What's this now?

PROFESSOR

Look for Batiushkov tomorrow morning; we used to have him, I remember--. Why do I find it so hard to breathe?

HELENA

You're worn out; this is the second night you've been unable to sleep.

PROFESSOR

They say that Ivan Turgenieff got angina pectoris from gout. I'm afraid I'm getting it, too. Oh, damn this terrible, accursed old age! Ever since I've grown old, I have been repulsive to myself, and I'm sure, repulsive to all of you too.

HELENA

You speak as if we were to blame for your age.

PROFESSOR

You're young and healthy and beautiful, and have a long full life ahead of you. While I am almost a corpse. It's foolish for me to live so long, but wait! I shall soon set you all free. My life can't drag on much longer.

HELENA

You're exhausting me. For God's sake, be quiet!

PROFESSOR

Everybody is exhausted thanks to me.

HELENA

Be quiet! You're torturing me.

PROFESSOR

I torture everyone--.

HELENA

This is unendurable! Tell me, what do you wish of me?

PROFESSOR

Nothing.

HELENA

Then please be quiet.

PROFESSOR

(Beat)

Funny, isn't it. Everybody listens to Ivan Petrovitch, what does everyone call him?

HELENA

Uncle Vanya.

PROFESSOR

And his old idiot of a mother, Maria Vassilievna, but the moment I open my trap, you all feel abused. You can't even bear the sound of my voice can you? Suppose I am repulsive, suppose I am a selfish tyrant, haven't I the right to be at my age? Haven't I earned it? Haven't I, I ask you, the right to be respected, considering how ancient I am?

HELENA

No one is disputing your rights. *(She crosses to a window)* We shall have rain in a moment.

PROFESSOR

...I spent my life working for the cause of education. I am accustomed to the library and the lecture hall and the admiration of intellectual elite. Now I suddenly find myself in this wilderness, this farm, condemned to see the same idiotic people from morning till night and to listen to their silly chatter. Oh, it's terrible to spend every moment grieving for a past that is lost as I sit here with nothing to do but fear death. It is more than I can endure. And you won't even forgive me for being old!

HELENA

Wait; be patient; in four or five years, I shall be old too and whither away with you.

(Sonya comes in.)

SONYA

Father, you sent for Dr. Astroff again?

PROFESSOR

So what.

SONYA

And now you refuse to see him. It's not fair to trouble that man needlessly.

PROFESSOR

What do I care about your Dr. Astroff? He understands medicine about as well as I understand animal husbandry. What time is it?

HELENA

I don't know, one o'clock in the morning?

PROFESSOR

It's stifling in here. Sonya, my medicine.

(SONYA grabs a small bottle on the table.)

PROFESSOR

Not that one! Not that one! Not that one! Yes, that one. Can't I ask you to do a single thing?

(THE PROFESSOR takes his pills. A flash of lightning. UNCLE VANYA enters dressed in a long gown and carrying a candle.)

UNCLE VANYA

A thunderstorm is approaching. *(The lightning flashes)* There it is! Go and get some sleep - I've come to relieve you.

PROFESSOR

No, no, no! Don't leave me alone with him! He'll begin lecturing me.

UNCLE VANYA

You have no choice, old man, they haven't slept for two nights.

PROFESSOR

Then let them go to bed, but you go away, too! I beg you. Go. For the sake of our former friendship, don't argue.

UNCLE VANYA

Our former friendship! What former friendship? When were we ever friends?!

SONYA

Hush, Uncle Vanya !

PROFESSOR

(To his wife)

Sweetheart, don't leave me alone with him. He'll lecture me.

UNCLE VANYA

This is absurd.

(NURSE MARINA enters carrying a candle.)

SONYA

You must go to bed, nurse, it's late.

NURSE MARINA

Who can sleep?

PROFESSOR

None of them can. They are all worn out by life and work. Only I enjoy a life of the mind. I alone know perfect happiness.

NURSE MARINA

Does it hurt?

PROFESSOR

A little.

NURSE MARINA

My own legs ache, too, oh, so badly. Let's get you on your feet. Old people like to be treated like children, but somehow nobody cares about them. Come to bed, professor, I shall pray to God for you.

PROFESSOR

There, see, at least someone cares.

NURSE MARINA

My own feet ache so badly, oh, so badly! *(She and Sonya start leading the Professor out)*
Come, come, Professor.

(PROFESSOR, SONYA and NURSE MARINA go out.)

HELENA

I am absolutely exhausted by him. I can hardly stand on my two feet.

UNCLE VANYA

He exhausted you and I have exhausted myself. I haven't slept for three nights.

HELENA

There's something wrong in this house. Your mother hates everything but her silly philosophical pamphlets and the professor; the professor is vexed, he won't trust me and he fears you.

UNCLE VANYA

What's to fear about me?

HELENA

Sonya is angry with her father and hasn't spoken to me in a fortnight; you hate my husband and openly sneer at your mother. I have reached the limit of my endurance. At least twenty times tonight, I've nearly burst into tears. There's something wrong in this house.

UNCLE VANYA

Then it's best not to talk about it.

HELENA

You're an educated man, Vanya. Surely you understand that the world is not destroyed by criminals and fanatics, but by hate and malice and above all pettiness. Your duty, as an educated man, is to rise above the pettiness and make peace.

UNCLE VANYA

How about if I start by making peace with you?

(He tries to take her hand, she pulls away.)

HELENA

Don't. Please, I'd rather be alone.

UNCLE VANYA

The rain will soon be over, and all nature will awake refreshed and sigh with relief. Only I am not refreshed. Day and night I'm haunted. I can't help but think that I frittered away my youth on trifles, and I'm left with a reality that's absurd. What shall I do with my life and my love? What is going to become of them? This glorious feeling in my heart will be lost as a ray of sunlight that has fallen into a well, and my life will be lost with it.

HELENA

You talk of love... How am I to deal with that? Talking does no good.

(She tries to leave. He bars her way.)

UNCLE VANYA

If you only knew how it tortures me to think that beside me in this house, in the very next bedroom, is another life that is being lost forever! What're you waiting for? What accursed philosophy, morals, culture holds you back?

HELENA
You're drunk!

UNCLE VANYA
It wouldn't be the first time.

HELENA
Where's the doctor?

UNCLE VANYA
In the next room. He's staying the night. Perhaps I am drunk, perhaps I am - nothing is impossible.

HELENA
Why have you been drinking?

UNCLE VANYA
Because it gives me a taste of life. Please Helena, don't ignore me. My sweetheart, my precious--. My heart - feel my heart--.

(He takes her hands. She pulls away.)

HELENA
Leave me alone! Really, this has become... disagreeable.

(She leaves. UNCLE VANYA sits down beside the sleeping WAFFLES.)

UNCLE VANYA
And she's gone! *(Beat)* It was ten years ago that I met her first, at her late sister's house. She was seventeen then and I thirty seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her then and propose? It would have been so easy! And if I had, she'd now be my wife. Yes, tonight's thunderstorm would have wakened us both. But I would have held her in my arms and whispered: "Don't be afraid! I'm here." Oh, what a charming dream, so sweet that I smile when I think of it. *(He laughs)* God! Why am I so old? Oh, how I have been cheated. For years I have worshiped that miserable gout-ridden professor. Sonya and I have milked this estate dry for his sake. We have sold our butter and curds and wheat like misers, and never kept a bit for ourselves, so that we could scrape together enough pennies to send to him. I was once proud of him and his learning; I thought all his words and writings were inspired. But now? Now I've met him face to face, the truth comes out. Now that he is retired we can see the grand total of his life? Zero! His non-existent fame has burst like a soap bubble. I've been cheated. Cheated.

(DR. ASTROFF enters. He is wearing his coat but is without waistcoat or collar and is slightly drunk. He wakes WAFFLES.)

DR. ASTROFF
(Drunk)
Play! Play!

WAFFLES
But everyone is asleep.

Play! Now.

DR. ASTROFF

(WAFFLES plays softly.)

DR. ASTROFF
Are you alone? No women around? "The room is cold, the fire is out. Where shall the master find his rest?" The thunderstorm woke me. It was a regular downpour. What time is it?

UNCLE VANYA
The devil only knows.

DR. ASTROFF
I thought I heard Helena's voice.

UNCLE VANYA
She was here a moment ago.

DR. ASTROFF
What a beautiful woman! (*Looking at the bottles of medicine on the table*) We have here what is called a pharmacy. From Moscow, from Kharkoff, from Tula! Is there a physician he hasn't seen? I mean really, is he truly ill, or just a good thespian?

UNCLE VANYA
He's ill.

DR. ASTROFF
And what of you? Are we in love with the professor's fetching wife?

UNCLE VANYA
She's a friend.

DR. ASTROFF
Already?

UNCLE VANYA
Meaning?

DR. ASTROFF
Here is the order as far as the opposite sex is concerned - First comes acquaintance, then lover, only when a man and woman have got that business behind them can they be, quote, "friends."

UNCLE VANYA
What a pleasant point of view.

DR. ASTROFF
(*Laughing*)
And why not. I'm intoxicated and so it's allowed. As a rule I drink like this only once a month. And once a month, when I do drink, my boldness knows no bounds. I'm capable of anything. The most brilliant plans evolve in my brain. I'm no longer a poor simpleton country doctor, but mankind's greatest benefactor. I work out my own school of

philosophy and all of the rest of you crawl at my feet like so many worms or microbes.
(*To Waffles*) Waffles, play!

WAFFLES

My dear fellow, I would with all my heart, but listen to reason; everyone in the house is asleep.

DR. ASTROFF

Play!

(WAFFLES plays.)

DR. ASTROFF

I need another drink. Come, we still have some brandy left.

(SONYA enters.)

DR. ASTROFF

I beg your pardon, I have no tie on.

(He departs, followed by WAFFLES)

SONYA

(*Putting away the Professor's pharmacy*)

Uncle Vanya, you and the doctor have been drinking! It's all very well for him, he's accustomed to it. But why follow his example?

UNCLE VANYA

When realities are missing, one must create illusions.

SONYA

All our hay is cut and rotting in the rain and you waste your time creating illusions! You are neglecting the farm completely. I've done all the work by myself until I'm at the end of my strength - (*really looking at him for the first time*) Uncle! Your eyes are full of tears!

UNCLE VANYA

Nonsense, there are no tears in my eyes. You looked at me then just as your dead mother used to... My sister, my dear dear sister, where are you now? If you only knew, if you only knew!

SONYA

If she only knew what, Uncle?

UNCLE VANYA

My heart... Never mind, it's nothing.

(He goes out.)

SONYA

Mikhail Lvovitch! Doctor. Come in here please.

(He appears with his tie and waistcoat on.)

DR. ASTROFF

What do you wish?

SONYA

Drink as much as you please, but I beg you don't let my uncle follow your example. He doesn't know how to drink.

DR. ASTROFF

All right; we won't drink any more. As a matter of fact, I'm going home. Yes, that's settled. By the time the horses are harnessed, it will be dawn.

SONYA

Wait till morning.

DR. ASTROFF

Why should I?

SONYA

It's raining.

DR. ASTROFF

The storm is over. I must go. (*Angered*) And please don't ask me to attend to your father any more. I tell him he has gout, and he insists it is rheumatism. I tell him to lie down - he sits up. I'm called to see him, he refuses to see me...

SONYA

He's difficult. Won't you have a bite to eat?

DR. ASTROFF

...Yes, please, I think I will.

SONYA

People say the professor has had too much success with women in his life - They have spoiled him.

(They stand eating by the sideboard.)

DR. ASTROFF

I haven't eaten a thing all day. Only drink. (*Taking a bottle out of the sideboard*) May I? (*Pouring himself a glass of vodka*) We are alone... Can I speak frankly?

SONYA

Of course.

DR. ASTROFF

The truth!

SONYA

Yes. Truth.

DR. ASTROFF

I couldn't bear to live in this house for even a month. The atmosphere would choke me. You have your father, totally absorbed in his books and his gout; Your Uncle with his

year round depression, your grandmother and her pamphlets, and finally your... what do you call her, your step-mother? Your twenty-seven year old stepmother.

SONYA

What about her?

DR. ASTROFF

A human being should be beautiful in everything: in looks, in dress, in soul, in mind. Your stepmother, of course, is beautiful to gaze upon, but don't you see? She does nothing but sleep and eat and walk and charm us. No responsibilities. No work. Everything is done for her-am I not right? An idle existence can never be pure. Still, maybe I'm judging her too harshly. I'm like your Uncle, a pessimist.

SONYA

Aren't you satisfied with life?

DR. ASTROFF

I like life as life, but I hate the fact that I must fritter it away in a dirty Russian village. I have no hope; I do not care for people. And it's been a long time since I have cared for any one.

SONYA

You care for no one?

DR. ASTROFF

I feel a kind of tenderness for your old nurse, for old-times' sake. But everyone else? The peasants, the worker bees, are all alike; stupid and dirty. And the educated people are petty and shallow. They see no farther than their own noses; in a single word, they are dull. They whine, they hate, they find fault everywhere. They crawl up to me on the sly, leer, and say that I'm raving mad, they call me a bag of wind. Or, if they don't know what to call me, they say I am peculiar. I like the forest; that's peculiar. I don't eat red meat; that's peculiar, too. Simple, natural relations between human beings or between humans and nature have no meaning in their eyes.

(He tries to take a drink; Sonya prevents him.)

SONYA

I beg you, I implore you, don't drink any more!

DR. ASTROFF

Why not?

SONYA

It's so unworthy of you. You're refined. You're handsome... Your voice... It's tender... Why do you want to be like the common people who drink and gamble? You're always saying that people never create anything, but only destroy what nature has given them. So why do you insist on destroying yourself?

DR. ASTROFF

(Giving her his hand)

...I won't drink any more.

SONYA

Promise.

DR. ASTROFF

I give you my word.

SONYA

You're sweet.

DR. ASTROFF

I'm through with it. Yes. There. I'm sober already. And I shall remain so until the end of my days. *(He looks at his watch)* Oh Sonya, I'm so tired. And I feel so little. I could never again have any attachment for any one. I love no one, and - I never shall! Beauty alone still has the power to affect me. It moves me deeply. Helena Andreievna could turn my head in a day if she cared to, but that's not love, nor affection. *(He shudders)*

SONYA

What is the matter?

DR. ASTROFF

Nothing. One of my patients died on the operating table.

SONYA

You must try to forget that now. Tell me, Mikhail Lvovitch, if I had a friend or say a younger sister, and if you knew that she, well - that she was in love with you, what would you do?

DR. ASTROFF

Loved me?

SONYA

Yes. Totally. Completely in love.

DR. ASTROFF

Don't know. I suppose I would do... nothing. I would have to make her understand that I could not return her love - that my mind does not bother itself with such affairs now--. I must start at once if I am ever to go. Goodbye, dear girl. At this rate, we shall stay here talking till morning. *(Shaking hands with her)* I shall go out through the sitting room - I'm afraid your uncle might see me and start talking and then I'd never get home.

(He goes out.)

SONYA

(Alone)

He said nothing and yet I'm happy. *(Laughing with pleasure)* I told him that he was handsome and that his voice was tender. Was that wrong? I can still feel his voice... Oh, how frightful it is to be plain! I'm plain, I know it. Last Sunday as I was coming out of church, I overheard a woman say, "She is a dear, noble girl, but what a pity she is so plain!"

(HELENA enters and throws open the window.)

HELENA

The storm has passed. What wonderful air! Where's the doctor?

SONYA

Gone. Goodnight.

HELENA

How much longer are you going to be short with me? We have done each other no harm. Why should we be enemies?

SONYA.

I...

HELENA

Haven't you had enough of this? It wastes so much time and energy... Please.

SONYA

I... You want to make peace?

HELENA

With all my heart.

HELENA

Heaven knows why we haven't been on speaking terms.

SONYA

It's my fault.

HELENA

No it's mine. Oh, look. Wine. Friends?

SONYA

Yes, let's.

(She pours a glass of vodka.)

HELENA

Out of one glass. *(Filling a glass)* We are friends, aren't we?

SONYA

Yes. *(They drink and kiss each other)* I wanted to make friends for so long, but somehow I was ashamed to. *(She weeps.)*

HELENA

Why?

SONYA

I don't know.

HELENA

There, there, don't cry. *(She weeps)* Silly! Now you got me crying, too. *(Beat)* Admit it - You're angry with me because you think I married your father for his money. I swear to you I married him for love. I was fascinated by his lectures and his learning. I know now that it wasn't real love, that it was never real, but it seemed real enough at the time. I'm innocent, and yet ever since my marriage your sharp suspicious eyes have been accusing me.

SONYA

Let's forget the past.

HELENA
You must trust people, or life becomes impossible.

SONYA
Tell me, truthfully, as a friend, are you happy?

HELENA
Truthfully... No.

SONYA.
I knew it. One more question: would you like your husband to be young?

HELENA
Of course! Go on, ask me something else.

SONYA
Do you like the doctor?

HELENA
Yes, very much, indeed.

SONYA
(Laughing)
I have a stupid face, haven't I? He just left, and his voice still sings in my ears; I can hear his step; I can see his face. Let me speak all that I have in my heart! But no, I can't say it publicly. I'm ashamed. I seem silly to you, don't I? Of course I do. Tell me about him!

HELENA
The doctor?

SONYA
Who else?

HELENA
What can I say?

SONYA.
He's clever.

HELENA
Yes.

SONYA
He can heal the sick, and plant forests.

HELENA
He is a man of genius. Do you realize what that means? It means he is courageous, deep and clear of vision.

SONYA
More.

HELENA

He plants a tree and his mind swings a thousand years into the future and he dreams of the happiness of the human race. People like him are rare and ought to be loved. What if he does drink and use rough words at times? In Russia, a man of genius cannot be a saint.

SONYA

Never.

HELENA

Yet, here he exists, cut off from the world by frost and storms and trackless muddy roads, surrounded by ignorant people who are crushed by poverty and disease. His life is one endless struggle, with never a day's rest. How can a man live like that for forty years and stay sober?

SONYA

I couldn't.

HELENA

With all my heart, I wish you happiness; you deserve it. (*Getting up*) As for me, I am a worthless, useless woman. Always useless; in music, in love, in my husband's home, to be... brief - in everything. When you stop to think of it, Sonya, I am really very, very unhappy. Nor can I ever achieve happiness in my lifetime.

(SONYA breaks out laughing.)

HELENA

Why?

SONYA

I'm so happy, so happy!

(SONYA does a little dance. Depressed
HELENA crosses to the piano.)

HELENA

Perhaps I'll play a little.

SONYA

Oh, do! Yes! I couldn't possibly sleep now. Do play!

HELENA

Yet, your father is still awake. Music annoys him when he's ill, but if he says I may, then I shall play a little. Go ask him.

SONYA

Of course. He can't possibly deny us. I'll be right back.

(She runs out. HELENA sits at the piano.)

HELENA

...It's a long time since I've heard music. And now, I shall sit and play and cry like a simpleton. ...I am in love with the doctor...

(SONYA returns, dejected.)

He says "No."

SONYA

(Doleful, SONYA sits with HELENA at the piano. HELENA defiantly hits one note. They laugh. But then fall silent and depressed. And the lights fade.)

End of Two

UNCLE VANYA

THREE

A Living Room

(It's been years since this room has been used to entertain. It is early afternoon. UNCLE VANYA and SONYA wait. HELENA paces. WAFFLES sleeps.)

UNCLE VANYA

Herr Professor has deigned to express the wish that we are to all gather in the drawing room at one o'clock. (*Looking at his watch*) It is now a quarter after one. I'm sure it's an important message that must be conveyed to the world.

HELENA

It's probably a question of business.

UNCLE VANYA

What does he know about business? He writes academic nonsense, uses clever words, complains and eats out his heart with jealousy; that's his life.

SONYA

Uncle--.

UNCLE VANYA

I swear his brain has leaked into his ears.

SONYA

Uncle please. You infect everyone with your mood.

UNCLE VANYA

Very well. I beg your pardon. (*Pointing to Helena*) Look at her. Roaming up and down out of sheer idleness like a dog on a leash. Though a pretty picture of pampered idleness I must say!

HELENA

I'm surprised that it doesn't bore you to strum on the same note from morning to night. (*With despair*) This tedium is killing me. What shall I do?

SONYA

There is plenty to do if you wish to.

HELENA

For instance?

SONYA

You could help run the estate, look after the sick peasants, teach their children - isn't that enough? Before you and father came, Uncle Vanya and I used to take the grain to market ourselves.

HELENA

I know nothing about such matters, and, besides, only in sentimental novels do women go out and teach and look after sick peasants. How can I start in doing it all of a sudden?

SONYA

Be patient and you'll get used to it. (*Embracing her*) Don't be melancholy, dearest. (*Laughing*) You feel out-of-sorts and restless and unable, somehow, to fit into this life, and your restlessness is contagious. And you've infected Uncle Vanya, he does nothing now but trail you like a shadow, and I have given up my work today to come here and... wait! I'm getting lazy and losing interest in my work. And it's not just me. The Doctor hardly ever used to come here; it was all we could do to induce him to visit us once each month, and now he has given up his forestry and his medicine, and comes every day. You must be a witch.

UNCLE VANYA

Come, my darling, my sweetheart, be sensible! A mermaid's blood runs in your veins. Why don't you behave like one? Fall heels over head in love, plunge headlong into a deep pool, so that Herr Professor and all the rest of us may be free again.

(UNCLE VANYA gets down and acts like a dog. HELENA laughs.)

HELENA

How brutal you are!

(She tries to leave. UNCLE VANYA stops her.)

UNCLE VANYA

There, there, my darling, I apologize. Forgive me. (*He kisses her hand*) Peace!

HELENA

Admit that you would try the patience of a saint.

UNCLE VANYA

As a peace offering, I'm going to bring you some flowers I picked for you this morning; some autumn roses, glorious, mournful roses.

(He leaves.)

SONYA

Autumn roses, glorious, mournful roses!

(She and Helena stand at the window looking out.)

HELENA

September already! How are we going to live through the long winter here? ... Where is the doctor?

SONYA.

I don't know, he was here earlier... Look before Uncle Vanya comes back, I'd like to talk to you about something.

HELENA

About what?

SONYA

About what?

(SONYA breaks down in tears.)

HELENA

There, there! Don't, Sonya.

SONYA

He'll never love me. I'm plain.

HELENA

You have beautiful... hair.

SONYA

Don't say that! When a woman is plain, they always say that she has beautiful hair or, worse, beautiful eyes. For six years now I've loved the Doctor; I've loved him more than my own mother. Every second, I seem to hear him by my side. Feel his hand pressing mine. Every day now he comes here, but he never looks at me, he looks through me. (*In despair*) Yesterday I told Uncle Vanya that I loved the doctor. I couldn't help it. I even confessed it to the servants. The whole world knows that I love him.

HELENA

But does he?

SONYA

How could he, he doesn't know I exist.

HELENA

Yes. He is a peculiar man... He... Listen, Sonya, will you permit me to speak to him? I shall be careful and only gently hint. Really, to live in such uncertainty all these years! Let me do it!

(Sonya nods affirmatively.)

HELENA

It'll be easy to find out whether or not he loves *you*. Don't worry. I shall be careful; he won't even notice it. We only wish to find out whether it is yes or no, don't we? And if it is no, then he can't keep coming here, isn't that right?

(Sonya nods.)

HELENA

It would be easier not to see him any more, am I right?

(Sonya nods.)

HELENA

We won't delay this an instant. He said he wanted to show me his sketches. Go and tell him at once that I wish to see him.

SONYA

Yes, yes. I shall say that you wish to see his sketches. *(She starts to go, but stops near the door and looks back)* No, it's better not to know - and yet - maybe there's hope.

HELENA

What are you saying?

SONYA

I don't know... I'll go get him.

(SONYA leaves. HELENA sits down beside the sleeping WAFFLES.)

HELENA

Obviously, he's not in love with her. But why shouldn't he marry her? She isn't pretty, but she does have... beautiful hair. She'd make an excellent wife for a country doctor of his years. I can feel for the poor child. Here she lives in this desperate loneliness with no one about her except these gray shadows who do nothing but eat, drink, sleep and talk nonsense. Among them from time to time appears this Dr. Astroff, so different, so handsome, so entertaining. It's like seeing the moon rise on a dark night. Oh, to surrender yourself, body and soul, to such a man! Yes, without him I am lonely; when I think of him, I smile. But I am cowardly... He comes here every day now. I know the real reason he comes... Dear Sonya, forgive me...

(DR. ASTROFF enters carrying a portfolio.)

DR. ASTROFF

Good afternoon! I'm told you wish to see my sketches.

HELENA

Yes, you promised you'd show me. Have you time now?

DR. ASTROFF

Of course!

(He lays the portfolio on the table, takes out a sketch and attaches it to the table with thumbtacks.)

DR. ASTROFF

Where were you born?

HELENA

(Helping him out)

Petersburg.

You were educated there?
DR. ASTROFF

Yes, at the Conservatory.
HELENA

I don't suppose you find this life very interesting.
DR. ASTROFF

It's true I don't know country life very well, but I've read a great deal about it if I remember.
HELENA

This is a survey map.
DR. ASTROFF
(*Pointing to the picture*)

Interesting.
HELENA

DR. ASTROFF
It shows our country as it was fifty years ago. The green tints, both light and dark, stand for forests. Half the map, you see, is covered with them. Where the green is striped with red, the forests were stocked with elk and wild goats. Here in this lake were great flocks of swans and geese. (*Turning the page*) And this is the country as it was twenty-five years ago. Only a third of the map now is green with forests. Still we see spots of green, but very little. The great flocks have vanished like a mist. Perhaps you may object that it is the march of progress, that the old order must give way to the new, but as it is, we have nothing of the kind. We have the same swamps and mosquitoes; the same disease and misery. The degradation of our country confronts us, brought on by the human race's fierce struggle for existence. It is all the result of ignorance. We consume everything on which we can lay our hands, without a thought for the future. But I see by your expression that it does not interest you.

I know so little about such things.
HELENA

There's nothing to know. It simply isn't interesting, that's all.
DR. ASTROFF

Frankly, my thoughts were elsewhere. Forgive me, I must ask you something, but I'm embarrassed and I don't know how to begin.
HELENA

Ask me something?
DR. ASTROFF

Yes, quite an innocent question. It's about a young girl I know. My we speak frankly? Like friends? And then forget what will have passed between us, shall we?
HELENA

All right.
DR. ASTROFF

HELENA

How can I say this gently. My stepdaughter, Sonya. Do you like her?

DR. ASTROFF

Yes, I like her very much.

HELENA

But do you *like* her - as a woman?

DR. ASTROFF

As a woman... No.

HELENA

One word more and that will be the last. You have noticed nothing?

DR. ASTROFF

Nothing.

HELENA

You don't love her. I see it in your eyes. She is suffering. You must understand that and not come here any more.

DR. ASTROFF

I see...

HELENA

What a disgusting conversation. I am as breathless as if I had been running three miles uphill. Thank heaven, that is done with. Now let us forget everything that has been said. But you must leave at once. You're sensible - You understand. I am actually blushing.

DR. ASTROFF

Of course, if the poor girl is suffering - but I can't understand your reasons for--. *(Beat)* Oh. I get it.

HELENA

Get what?

DR. ASTROFF

You are a sly one! *(Mocking)* Do I like *Sonya* as a woman?

HELENA

I don't understand.

DR. ASTROFF

Sonya is suffering.

HELENA

Yes, that's what I was asking.

DR. ASTROFF

(Laughing)

I see what is going on here. Please don't look so surprised; you know perfectly well why I come here every day. Yes, perfectly well. Oh, my little bird of prey! Don't look at me that way; I am an old sparrow!

HELENA
(Perplexed)

Bird of prey? I don't follow.

DR. ASTROFF

Beautiful, fluffy bird of prey, you must have your victims! For an entire month, I have done nothing but hunt you. I have cast aside everything for you, and it pleases you to see it. Now then, I'm sure you knew all this without submitting me to cross-examination.

HELENA

What are you saying?

DR. ASTROFF

I yield, you don't have to play any more games, I'm yours. Now, go ahead, eat me!

HELENA

...Have you gone insane!

DR. ASTROFF
(Laughing ironically)

afraid!

You're

HELENA

I am a better and stronger woman than you think me.

(She tries to leave the room. He bars the way.)

DR. ASTROFF

I'll go away today. I shan't come here any more. But - *(Taking her hand and glancing about)* - for the future - where shall we meet? Tell me quickly, where? Some one may come in. Tell me quickly! - *(Passionately)* You are so gloriously beautiful! - Just one kiss - let me kiss your hair!

HELENA

I swear to you!

DR. ASTROFF

Let us not waste words! Ah, how lovely you are - what hands! *(Kissing her hands.)*

HELENA

Enough! Go away! *(Freeing her hands)* You are forgetting yourself!

DR. ASTROFF

Tell me! Tell me! Where will we meet tomorrow? *(Putting his arms around her)* Don't you see! We must meet! It is inevitable.

(He kisses her. She tries to break away from him. UNCLE VANYA comes in carrying a bunch of roses, and halts in the doorway. They don't see him.)

HELENA

Don't!

DR. ASTROFF

Meet me in the forest tomorrow at two. Yes! Will you come?

(They see UNCLE VANYA and release.)

HELENA

Oh my God!

UNCLE VANYA

Nothing - yes, yes, nothing.

DR. ASTROFF

(Back to the portfolio - attempting to cover)

... It's a fine day, my dear Ivan Petrovitch. This morning, the sky was overcast and it looked like rain, but now the sun is shining. After all, we've had a very fine autumn, and the wheat crop looks unusually promising. But the days are growing short and there is nothing to be done about it.

HELENA

(To Uncle Vanya)

You must do your best; you must use all your influence to get my husband and myself away from here today! Do you hear? Today!

UNCLE VANYA

Oh! Ah! Oh! Very well--. I saw everything!

HELENA

Do you hear me? I must leave here today!

(PROFESSOR, SONYA, and WAFFLES enter.)

PROFESSOR

Where are the rest? I hate this house. It is a regular carnival maze. Every one is always scattered through its twenty-six rooms. There's no finding anyone. *(Ringing a little bell on the table)* Ask Maria Vassilievna and Helena Andreievna to come here!

HELENA

I am here.

NURSE MARIA

So am I.

PROFESSOR

Oh, well then, please sit down, all of you.

(WAFFLES wakes.)

SONYA

(Anxiously to Helena)

What did he say?

HELENA

Can I tell you later?

SONYA

You're upset. (*Looking swiftly and with inquiry into her face*) I understand; he said he would not come here any more. That's what he said didn't he?

(Helena nods.)

PROFESSOR

I have learned that one can be resigned to being an invalid, but living out here in the sticks is another matter. I feel as if I had been tossed from this earth and dumped on a strange planet. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen. Sonya ! (*No reaction.*) Sonya! (*Still nothing*) Is she listening? Nothing. Fine. Please everyone sit.

(NURSE MARINA sits and knits.)

PROFESSOR

If I may have your unqualified attention. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would be so kind as to lend me your ears... That's Shakespeare--.

UNCLE VANYA

May I be excused? Thank you.

(He starts to leave.)

PROFESSOR

No, you're needed now more than any one else.

UNCLE VANYA

What is it?!

PROFESSOR

What makes you so angry? If it's anything I've done, I beg your forgiveness.

UNCLE VANYA

Oh, forget that and come to the point!

(NURSE MARINA enters pushing WIDOW MARIA.)

PROFESSOR

Here is mother. Good. We are all here. Ladies and gentlemen, I shall begin. I have asked you to gather here, my friends, to inform you that the inspector general is coming. (*He laughs, no one else does*) Seriously, all jokes aside, I wish to discuss a very important matter. As you know, I am no longer young. Nor the picture of health. And I realize that the time has come for me to stop thinking of myself and consider the needs of my young wife and unmarried daughter. And so I've decided that I cannot go on living... in the country - We were not all country people so to speak. And yet, the truth is, we cannot afford to live in the city on the meager income derived from this little estate. And so I have the honor of proposing to you a solution. I shall give you only a rough outline, foregoing all particulars. This estate pays on average two per cent on the investment annually. And so I propose to sell it. If then we invest our capital in suitable investments, it will bring us four to five per cent with which we could procure a modest cottage in Finland--.

UNCLE VANYA

Wait a moment! What did you just say? I don't believe I heard you quite right.

PROFESSOR

I said we would invest the money in suitable investments and buy a cottage in Finland.

UNCLE VANYA

No, not Finland - you said something else.

PROFESSOR

I propose to sell this estate.

UNCLE VANYA

Aha! That was it! Sell the estate? Splendid! That's a rare idea! I may be a little obvious, what do you propose to do with my old mother and myself and with Sonya, here?

PROFESSOR

That will be determined in due course. We can't do everything at once.

UNCLE VANYA

Hold on a second. I realize that up till now I've never had an ounce of sense in my head. I've always been stupid enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonya. My late father bought it as a wedding gift for my dear departed sister, and as our laws were made for Russians and not for Turks, I foolishly imagined that my sister's estate would pass on to her child, Sonya.

PROFESSOR

Of course it belongs to Sonya. Has anyone denied that? I don't wish to sell it without Sonya's consent; on the contrary, what I'm doing is for Sonya's benefit.

UNCLE VANYA

This is wholly beyond comprehension. Either I have gone insane or-or--.

WIDOW MARIA

Don't contradict the professor, he knows better than we do what is for the best!

UNCLE VANYA

Fine! Give me some water. *(He drinks)* Go on! Say anything you like - anything!

PROFESSOR

I can't understand why you're upset. I'm not insisting--.

WAFFLES

Your Excellency, as you know, not only do I feel a deep respect toward your learning, but I am also drawn toward your culture by family ties. My brother Grigory's wife's brother, whom you may know; his name is Constantin Trofimovitch Lakedemonoff, and he used to be a magistrate--.

UNCLE VANYA

Stop, Waffles. Why?

WAFFLES

I'm discussing business.

UNCLE VANYA

Business? Okay, we'll talk business. This estate cost ninety-five thousand rubles. My father paid seventy and left a mortgage of twenty-five. Here is business. This estate could never have been bought if I had not renounced my inheritance in favor of my dear departed sister, whom I loved deeply - and what's more, I worked like a slave for ten years and paid off the mortgage.

PROFESSOR

I regret that I ever started this conversation.

UNCLE VANYA

Thanks entirely to my personal efforts, the estate has an absolutely clear title, and now, when I have grown old, you propose to chase me off!

PROFESSOR

I can't understand what you're driving at.

UNCLE VANYA

For twenty-five years I've managed this estate. And I've sent you the proceeds from it like the most honest of servants, and you have never given me one single word of thanks for my pains, not one, neither in my youth nor now. You allowed me a meager annual salary of five hundred rubles, a beggar's pittance, and it has never even occurred to you to add one ruble to it.

PROFESSOR

What did I know about such things? I am not a practical man, I'm a scholar. You might've helped yourself to anything you desired.

UNCLE VANYA

What are you saying? I should've pilfered from the estate? Is that it? You despise me for *not* stealing?

WIDOW MARIA

That's enough!

WAFFLES

Vanya, old man, don't talk like this. Why spoil such a pleasant relationship? (*Embracing him*) Do stop!

UNCLE VANYA

For twenty-five years I've been sitting here with my mother like a mole in a burrow. All day long we talked with pride of you and your work, and spoke your name with respect; our evenings we wasted reading your inane academic publications, which my soul now detests.

WAFFLES

Don't, Vanya, don't do this. I can't endure it.

UNCLE VANYA

We used to consider you superhuman, but now the blinders have fallen from my eyes and I see you as you are! You write on art without knowing a thing about it. Those books of yours which I used to admire aren't worth a copper kopeck. You are a humbug!

A what? PROFESSOR

A humbug! UNCLE VANYA

What does that mean? PROFESSOR

Look it up in your library. UNCLE VANYA

What earthly right have you to address me in such language? What a trifle! If this estate is yours, then take it, and let me be ruined; I don't care! PROFESSOR

Please, I can't bear it any longer! HELENA

My life has been a failure. I am clever and courageous and strong! If I had lived a normal life I might have become another Schopenhauer or Dostoevsky. I am talking like an idiot! I am going insane! Mother, oh, mother! UNCLE VANYA

Listen, to me, right now listen to me! WIDOW MARIA

No, don't speak! I know what to do. UNCLE VANYA

(UNCLE VANYA exits.)

Tell me, what on earth was that about? He's a lunatic! I simply cannot live under the same roof with him. PROFESSOR

We are leaving today; we must prepare at once. HELENA

What a perfectly frightful human being! PROFESSOR

You must be merciful papa. Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! Have mercy on us! Remember how Uncle Vanya and grandmother used to copy and translate your books for you every night - every night. Uncle Vanya has toiled without rest; we never spend a penny on ourselves, but sent it all to you! SONYA

Did I accuse him of anything?! PROFESSOR

No. HELENA

Am I angry?!

PROFESSOR
(Angry)

No.

HELENA

Admit it, his behavior has been... peculiar!

PROFESSOR

Yes.

HELENA

Fine! Then, I shall go talk to him!

PROFESSOR

(The Professor and HELENA exit.)

Nurse, oh, nurse!

SONYA

It's all right, baby. When the geese have cackled they will be silent again. First they cackle and then they stop. Then they cackle again. Then it's quiet.

NURSE MARINA

Nurse...

SONYA

You're trembling. There, there. See, the geese have all gone now. Once again it's quiet.

NURSE MARINA

(A scream. BANG! An offstage gun shot is heard. Helena screams.)

What?! What's that?

NURSE MARINA

(THE PROFESSOR runs in followed by UNCLE VANYA with a revolver. HELENA tries to stop him.)

He's gone mad!

PROFESSOR

(HELENA and UNCLE VANYA struggle at the doorway.)

Give it to me; give it to me!

HELENA

Let me go, let me go!

UNCLE VANYA

(He frees himself and rushes over to the professor and points the revolver at him.)

PROFESSOR

You're mad!

(At point blank range UNCLE VANYA fires two shots. BANG BANG! Screams and smoke. Pause.)

UNCLE VANYA

I missed!

(THE PROFESSOR moves. Checks for wounds. He's fine.)

UNCLE VANYA

I missed... again. (*Enraged*) Damnation!

(He hurls the revolver to the floor and sinks helplessly into a chair. The PROFESSOR stands stupefied. HELENA runs up to him.)

HELENA

Take me away! Take me away! I can't stay here - I can't!

UNCLE VANYA

What am I doing? What am I doing?

SONYA
(*Softly*)

Oh, nurse, nurse!

(On a smoke filled silence the lights fade.)

END OF THREE

UNCLE VANYA

FOUR

Uncle Vanya's Bedroom/Study

(There is a table scattered with ledgers, letters, and papers of all descriptions. A cage hangs on the wall containing a starling. There is a map of Africa on the wall, obviously of use to no one. The stillness is complete. WAFFLES and NURSE MARINA sit facing each other, winding wool.

WAFFLES

Hurry Nurse, or we shall be called away to say good-bye before you've finished. They've ordered the carriage already.

NURSE MARINA

(Trying to wind more rapidly)

There isn't much left.

WAFFLES

I hear tell that they're going to live in Kharkoff.

NURSE MARINA

It will be so much better for all of us. Things will again be as they were: tea at eight, dinner at one, and supper in the evening; everything in order. Like other people. *(Sighing)* It is a long time since I, poor sinner, have eaten noodles.

WAFFLES

Yes, we haven't had noodles for ages. Not for ages.

NURSE MARINA

Have you seen Sonya?

WAFFLES

In the garden with the doctor, looking for Vanya. They're afraid he might do some harm to himself.

NURSE MARINA

And his revolver?

Clever me, I hid it in the cellar.

WAFFLES

You sinner.

NURSE MARINA

(They laugh. UNCLE VANYA and the DR. ASTROFF enter.)

UNCLE VANYA

Go away! Both of you leave. If only for an hour!

WAFFLES

Yes, yes, Vanya.

NURSE MARINA

The gander cackles again; ho! ho! ho!

(They exit.)

UNCLE VANYA

You too. Leave me alone.

DR. ASTROFF

I would, with the greatest pleasure. But I won't leave you until you have returned what you took from me.

UNCLE VANYA

I took nothing from you.

DR. ASTROFF

You think I'm joking.

UNCLE VANYA

I took nothing!

DR. ASTROFF

All right, then I shall have to stay a while longer, and then with your permission I will have to resort to force. We shall have to bind you and search you.

UNCLE VANYA

Do as you please. *(Beat)* To think... I made such a fool of myself! Twice! I shot twice and missed him both times! Strange! I attempted murder, and they're not going to arrest me or bring me to trial. That means they think I'm insane. *(Laughing bitterly)* I! Insane. It's not insane to hide your mediocrity behind a mask of scholarship and academic rank. It's not insane to marry old man and then sneak around behind his back. I saw you kiss her; I saw you in each other's arms!

DR. ASTROFF

So what? I kissed her; and that's for *you!* *(Putting his thumb to his nose)*

UNCLE VANYA

No, it is the world that is insane, because it still suffers us to exist.

DR. ASTROFF

That's nonsense.

UNCLE VANYA

Am I not a lunatic, and therefore no irresponsible? Haven't I the right to talk nonsense?

DR. ASTROFF

You are not insane; you are simply a ridiculous fool. I used to think every fool was out of his senses, but now I see that lack of sense is the normal human condition, and so you are perfectly normal.

UNCLE VANYA

Oh, my God! I am forty-seven. I may live to be sixty; I still have thirteen years ahead of me - an eternity! How can I endure life for thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I fill them? Oh, don't you see? Don't you see if I could only live the rest of my life in some new way! If I could only awake some still bright morning and feel that my life had begun all over; that the past was forgiven... vanished like smoke. Tell me, tell me, how to begin again!

DR. ASTROFF

What kind of a new life can you and I look forward to? We have no hope.

UNCLE VANYA

None?

DR. ASTROFF

None. I am convinced of that.

UNCLE VANYA

I'm having chest pains. I can't believe it; I'm having chest pains!

DR. ASTROFF

Oh stop it! (*Pause, more moderately*) Two hundred years from now - the people who live after us. What will they think of our blind and stupid lives? But perhaps they will find some path to happiness; but we - you and I - have but one hope, the hope that visions, pleasant ones perhaps, may haunt us as we rest in our graves. (*Sighing*) Yes dear sir, this life of ours, this wretched life, has sucked us under... we've become as contemptible and petty as the others. But don't try to talk me out of my purpose! Will you give me what you took from me?

UNCLE VANYA

What did I take?

DR. ASTROFF

You took a small bottle of morphine out of my doctor's case. Look, if you are positively determined to kill yourself, go into the woods and blow your brains out. But give me back the morphine, or there'll be suspicion; people will think I gave it to you. I don't relish the thought of cutting you open and performing a post-mortem on you.

(SONYA enters.)

DR. ASTROFF

Sonya, your uncle has stolen a bottle of morphine from my doctor's bag and won't give it back. Tell him his behavior is - well, unwise.

SONYA.

Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine?

DR. ASTROFF

Yes, he took it. I'm absolutely sure.

SONYA

Why do you wish to frighten us? (*Tenderly*) Give it up, Uncle! My sorrow is perhaps even keener than yours, but I am not in despair. I endure my grief and shall go on doing so until my life ends of itself. You must endure yours, too. (*Kissing his hands*) Dear, darling Uncle, give it up!

(UNCLE VANYA takes the bottle from the table drawer and gives it to DR. ASTROFF.)

DR. ASTROFF

Thank you.

UNCLE VANYA

(*To Sonya*)

And now we must get busy at once; we must do something! Keep busy.

SONYA

Yes, yes, let's work! As soon as we've seen them off, we'll go to work. Balance the books or something. (*Nervously she straightens out the papers on the table*) We have neglected so much.

DR. ASTROFF

(*Putting the bottle in the case and strapping it*)

Now I can go.

(HELENA enters.)

HELENA

There you are, Ivan Petrovitch. We are leaving? Go to Alexander, he wishes to speak to you.

SONYA.

Go, Uncle. (*Taking his arm*) Come, you must make peace...

(SONYA and UNCLE VANYA exit.)

HELENA

I'm leaving.

DR. ASTROFF

So soon?

HELENA

The carriage is waiting.

DR. ASTROFF

Then. Goodbye.

HELENA

You promised me that you, too, would go away today.

DR. ASTROFF

I haven't forgotten.

(HELENA starts to leave.)

DR. ASTROFF

Were you afraid? Was it so terrifying?

HELENA

...Yes.

DR. ASTROFF

Couldn't you stay? Couldn't we? Tomorrow in the forest.

HELENA

Everything is settled. It's impossible to change the course of things. One thing I must ask of you: don't think too harshly of me--.

DR. ASTROFF

Stay. Admit there's nothing for you to do, no purpose to your life. Nothing to occupy your mind. Sooner or later you will have to admit it. Why do it in Kharkoff, why not here in the lap of nature? Here, at least, it would be poetic, even beautiful. Here you have the forest...

HELENA

I'm angry with you and yet I shall always remember you with pleasure. You and I will never meet again, and so I shall tell you - why conceal it? ...I am just a little in love with you. Come. Let us part friends.

(She offers her hand. He takes it.)

DR. ASTROFF

Yes, go. (*Thoughtfully*) You seem sincere and yet there is something strangely restless about you. The moment you and your husband arrived here, every one whom you found busy and engaged in active, creative work felt compelled to drop it and give himself up to your husband's gout and your beauty for the entire summer. You and he have contaminated us with your elegant self-obsession. Wherever you go, you and your husband will always carry destruction in your wake. I'm joking, of course, and yet I am strangely convinced that if you had remained here, I would have perished, and you - no good would've come to you.

(She takes a pencil from his pocket.)

HELENA

I shall keep this pencil in remembrance!

DR. ASTROFF

Strange... We meet, and then all of a sudden it seems that we must part forever - The way of the world. While we are still alone, before Uncle Vanya returns allow me to kiss you goodbye - may I ? (*Kissing her on the cheek*) There! That's done.

HELENA

I wish you every happiness. For once in my life... (*She kisses him impulsively, and they part quickly*) I must go.

DR. ASTROFF

Yes, go. If the carriage is ready, then start at once.

HELENA

They're coming.

DR. ASTROFF

Yes.

(They pull apart just as UNCLE VANYA, PROFESSOR, WIDOW MARIA, WAFFLES and SONYA enter.)

PROFESSOR

(*To Uncle Vanya*)

Perhaps I will write a book about the last few hours. It would be about how to live. How to accept apologies. As I always say, let bygones be bygones. I accept your apology gladly, and I myself ask your forgiveness.

(He kisses UNCLE VANYA three times.
HELENA embraces SONYA.)

PROFESSOR

Mother!

WIDOW MARIA

(*Kissing him*)

Alexander! Have your picture taken again, and send it to me; you know how dearly I love you.

WAFFLES

Goodbye, your Excellency. Don't forget us.

PROFESSOR

(*Kissing his daughter*)

Goodbye, goodbye, every one. (*Shaking hands with Astroff*) Many thanks for your agreeable companionship. I have a deep regard for your opinions and your enthusiasm, but as an old man let me give you one piece of advice - Do something, *do something* - think about it. I wish you all things good.

(THE PROFESSOR goes out followed by MARIA and SONYA.)

UNCLE VANYA

(To Helena)

Goodbye. And forgive me. I shall never see you again

HELENA

(Touched)

Good-bye, dear boy.

(She kisses his head lightly as he bends over her hand, and then goes out.)

DR. ASTROFF

Tell them to bring my carriage around, too, Waffles.

WAFFLES

All right, sir.

(WAFFLES exits.)

DR. ASTROFF

Why don't you see them off?

UNCLE VANYA

I - I can't go out there. I must busy myself with something at once. *(Quietly)* To work, To work.

(He rummages through his papers on the table. A pause. As the horses trot away, the tinkle of bells is heard. NURSE MARINA enters.)

WIDOW MARIYA

They have gone.

NURSE MARINA

Yes, they're gone.

(NURSE MARINA sits and resumes knitting. SONYA comes in drying her eyes.)

SONYA

God be with them. *(To her uncle)* And now, Uncle, let us do something!

UNCLE VANYA

Yes. Must keep busy.

SONYA

It is a long, long time since you and I've sat together at this table. First, dear Uncle, let us do the accounts. They are in such a sad state. If you will look after those, I shall see to these.

(She hands him a ledger book. Beat. They write.)

DR. ASTROFF

How silent it is. The pens scratch, the cricket chirps; it is so warm and comfortable. I hate to go.

(The tinkling of bells is heard.)

DR. ASTROFF

But my carriage has come. All that is left is to say goodbye, my friends.

(He puts the map in the portfolio.)

NURSE MARINA

Don't hurry away; sit with us a little longer.

DR. ASTROFF

Not today.

UNCLE VANYA

(Writing)

And carry forward from the old debt two seventy-five...

(The WORKMAN enters.)

WORKMAN

Your carriage is waiting, sir.

DR. ASTROFF

Right. *(He hands the Workman his medicine-case and portfolio box)* Be careful, don't crush the portfolio!

WORKMAN.

Very well, sir.

SONYA

When shall we see you again?

DR. ASTROFF

Hardly before next summer. Probably not during the winter, at any rate. Though, if anything happens, let me know. Thank you for your hospitality, your kindness - for all you've done. *(He goes to the nurse and kisses her head)* Good-bye, old nurse.

NURSE MARINA

Are you going without your tea?

DR. ASTROFF

I don't care for any.

NURSE MARINA

Won't you have a drop of vodka?

Yes, I might.

DR. ASTROFF

(NURSE MARINA goes out)

DR. ASTROFF

(Beat)

My horse is limping for some reason. I noticed it yesterday when Peter was watering him.

UNCLE VANYA

Trying changing his shoes.

DR. ASTROFF

I shall have to stop at the blacksmith's on my way home. It can't be helped. *(He stands looking up at the map of Africa on the wall)* I suppose it is roasting hot in Africa this time of year.

UNCLE VANYA

Yes, I suppose....

(NURSE MARINA comes back carrying a tray with a glass of vodka. DR. ASTROFF drinks.)

DR. ASTROFF

Your health! *(He drinks)* And now, goodbye. You needn't come out to see me off.

(He leaves.)

UNCLE VANYA

(Writing)

On the 2nd of February, twenty pounds of butter; on the 16th, twenty pounds of butter once more. Buckwheat flour...

(A pause. The tinkling of bells is heard.)

SONYA

He's gone.

UNCLE VANYA

Total, fifteen - twenty-five -

NURSE MARINA

(Yawning)

Lord have mercy.

(WAFFLES enters and tunes his guitar.)

UNCLE VANYA

Oh, my child, I am so wretched; if you only knew how wretched I am.

SONYA

What can we do? We must live out our lives. Yes, we shall live, Uncle. We shall live all through the endless procession of days ahead of us, and through the long evenings. We shall bear patiently the burdens that fate imposes on us. We shall work without rest for others, both now and when we are old. And when our final hour comes, we shall meet it humbly, and there beyond the grave, we shall say that we have known suffering and tears, that our life was bitter. And God will have pity on us. Ah, then, dear Uncle, we shall enter on a bright and beautiful life. We shall rejoice and look back upon our grief. And - we shall rest. I have faith, Uncle. We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel. We shall see evil and all our pains disappear in the great pity that shall enfold the world. Our life will be as peaceful and gentle and sweet as a caress. I have faith; I have faith. (*Wiping away her tears*) My poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you're crying. (*Weeping*) You have never known what it is to be happy, but wait, dear uncle, wait! We shall rest. (*Embracing him*) We shall rest.

(WIDOW MARIA writes on the margin of her pamphlet; NURSE MARINA is knitting her stocking.)

SONYA.

We shall rest.

(The lights fade.)

The End